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DAVID'S CHOICE: *Or, the Sense*
of the GODLY *in every Age.*

BEING A
SERMON
ON THE
Present SITUATION
OF
Publick AFFAIRS.

By RICHARD MACHIN.

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2 SAM. XXIV. 14.

*Let us fall now into the hand of
the Lord, for his mercies are
great; and let me not fall into
the hand of man.*



THAT the world is govern-
ed by one glorious Sove-
reign, is an article to which
there is an universal assent
given by all men; and the
wise and good have ever entertained
the belief of it, with profound reve-
rence and peculiar pleasure: He
that in the beginning brought order
out of confusion, * holds the reins of
government, and conducts all transac-
tions here below; else the sinful en-
terprises, and unbounded views of wick-
ed men in power, would ferment the

* Gen. i. 1, 2.

world into a tumult, and keep it in a perpetual uproar. And with the deepest sense of this, we may join with the Psalmist; * *the Lord reigneth, let the earth rejoice, let the multitude of the isles be glad thereof.*—And he that guides all human affairs must be the alone refuge in every circumstance. And thus we find the inspired author, whose words we have now chosen, improving so important a truth; *let us now fall into the hand of the Lord, for his mercies are great; and let me not fall into the hand of man.* In which request there are three things that present unto us.

I. That the Lord is jealous of his honour, righteous in his ways, and sovereign in his government.

II. Whatever correction is necessary for sinful, revolting creatures, to recover them to a sense of that duty, they owe the King of kings, on whom all their blessings depend, it is their united request, that he may be the immediate dispenser of it.

III. It is a presage of indignation, when he puts it off to others.

* Psal. xcvi. 1.

I. I am to show that the Lord is jealous of his honour, righteous in his ways, and sovereign in his government. Under this head, we may observe,

1st, That when any thing usurps the place of God, in the hearts of men, it is observ'd by him with a just resentment. For while he hath a right to a superior regard from such as he hath form'd intelligent beings, it must stand numbered among crimes of the first magnitude, to pervert it to any thing besides him ; it is a *serving the creature more than the Creator* †. And how frequently do many fall short in this respect, without discerning it, or apprehending what rebukes it exposes to? We here find one of the greatest worthies that the church of God ever had, taken in this snare; upon which the Divine prerogative is asserted, and a particular messenger charged with the mind of God, consisting of the most humbling and solemn terms; eclipsing that grandeur which ingrossed the honour due unto him alone. The tide of all worldly prosperity, is the nearest an ebb, when it diverts the

† Rom. i. 25.

possessors from giving God the glory ; the genuine language of whose children is, *some trust in chariots, and some in horses, but we will remember the name of the Lord our God* *.

2. Chastisement for sin is certain, whether there be an immediate oracle from heaven to advertise of it or no. Wherever there is a departure, a rebuke will follow. It is true, there was an indulgence granted to *David*, but no remission ; the rod was appointed, and must light in some form or other. And when any publick distress, or private calamity appears, we may affirm, on the most solid grounds, that it is not without foundation ; for every sorrow we may assign one cause, *i. e.* sin ; that produces chastisements in some kind or other, which, tho' not *joyous* † but *grievous*, are necessary. And how well should that conduct be weighed and examined, that God so strictly observes and awfully censures !

3. All the acknowledgments that God receives from men, are free or

* Psal. xx. 7.

† Heb. xii. 11.

compulsive: the effect of a scepter of grace, engaging to a delightful and noble submission; or a rod of iron, by expressions of absolute power, that none can withstand. Which seems to be the main design of such dispensations as are levelled at eminent opposers of God, in the earth, or rebellious nations that sin against him; as in the case of *Pharoah*, whose swelling pride was abased in threatnings and their accomplishment: *I will send all my plagues upon thine heart, and upon thy servants, and upon thy people, that thou mayest know that there is none like me in all the earth.* And further, *In very deed, for this cause have I raised thee up, for to shew in thee my power, and that my name may be declared throughout all the earth**. The same power was exercised on *Nebuchadnezzar* and *Belsazzar*; *And at the end of the days, I Nebuchadnezzar lift up mine eyes unto heaven, and mine understanding returned unto me, and I blessed the Most High; and I praised and honoured him, whose dominion is an everlasting dominion, and his kingdom is from generation to generation †.* And what

* Exod. ix. 14, 15.

† Dan. iv. 34.

the father found true, the son was convinced of. So when judgments have been denounced, and have produced a visible submission, it hath been acceptable, as the Divine design was extended no further. Thus, when the prophet *Elijah* told *Ahab* of the evil God would bring on him and his house, it is said, * *he humbled himself, rent his clothes, put sackcloth upon his flesh, and fasted, and lay in a sackcloth, and went softly.* Thus, by speaking terrible things in righteousness, he protected his servants from the hand of the destroyer, and then granted him a little respite. The same account, I humbly conceive, may be given of *Jonah's* preaching in *Niniveh*, the capital city of the *Assyrians*; who had long made the nations round them groan under their oppression and cruelty, which was drawing near to a close, and the day of God's reckoning with them in the course of his providence approaching: This is said to be in the reign of the last of their kings †, the effect of which message from heaven, you may see declared, *Jonah* iii. 6. ult.

— For word came unto the king of

* 1 Kings xxi. 21, 22, 23. — xxvii. 29.
danapalus.

† Sar-

Nineveh, and he arose from his throne, and he laid his robe from him, and covered him with sackcloth, and sat in ashes. And he caused it to be proclaimed, and published through Nineveh, by the decree of the king and his nobles, saying, let neither man nor beast, herd nor flock, taste any thing; let them not feed, nor drink water. But let man and beast be covered with sackcloth, and cry mightily unto God; yea, let them turn every one from his evil way, and from the violence that is in their hands. Who can tell if God will turn and repent, and turn away from his fierce anger, that we perish not? And God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way, and God repented of the evil, that he had said, that he would do unto them, and he did it not.

Who can't see what hath always been the foundation of that happiness which men enjoy in this life, which by the government of providence, is asserted in such solemn instances; whereby the corruptions of men have been bridled, which otherwise would render the present state a dreadful situation indeed? Nor is it so much to my purpose to enquire how long they were spared afterwards, as to show that the government of heaven is universal, and

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that

that the Lord ruleth by his power for ever, and his eyes behold the nations; and whatever diversity of character there is among his subjects, all submit.

4. The Lord is always righteous in his doings; *just and true are all thy ways, thou King of saints* *. This we have in David's confession; *I have sinned greatly in, that I have done; and now I beseech thee, O Lord, take away the iniquity of thy servant, for I have done very foolishly* †. When as yet the messenger of heavy tidings was not come, the flight of vanity being over, grace assumed its prerogative, and passed a right censure; from which it was before prevented by the splendid amusement of national power, which drew on the awful visitation that succeeded it. As there can be no evil inflicted where sin hath not led the way, so all those hard articles that are complained of, and discerned in the face of the times, proceed from national iniquity; and a revival, by success of the means now used, may justly be dreaded, without a publick reformation; the mouths of

* Rev. xv. 3. † 2 Sam. xxiv. 10.

all being open to their sufferings, but never, scarcely to their sins, from whence they spring; not considering, that in every revolt from heaven, they have really contributed more weight to whatever difficulties attend the affairs of the land. If God be robbed of his honour, it is but an even return, if he *give Jacob to the spoil, and Israel to the robbers* *.

5. In vindicating his honour, he breaks all the power and counsel of men, either in speaking to his people in judgment, or defending them from their enemies, and never can be at a loss what to do; to whom *the nations are as a drop of a bucket, and are counted as the small dust of the balance; he taketh up the isles as a very little thing.* And again; *all nations before him are as nothing: And they are counted to him less than nothing and vanity. He bringeth the princes to nothing; he maketh the judges of the earth as vanity* †. Have we not an instance of this in a § neighbouring power, that has laboured for years past in alliances and intrigues, to subvert and enslave all the rest? but

* Isa. xlii. 24. † Isa. xl. 15, 17, 23. § France.

has been frustrated and detected by the righteous administration of the only potentate; who, at a season unexpected, made bare his holy arm, and, instead of succeeding their old favourite scheme, *viz.* to sit *as queen* among the nations *, dash'd the bubble to pieces. What an engaging consideration and bright step is this in our favour, and the generality of *Europe*? and calls loudly for the acknowledgments of love and praise.

II. Whatever correction is necessary for sinful, revolting creatures, to recover them to a sense of that duty they owe to the King of kings, on whom all their blessings depend, it is their united request that he may be the immediate dispenser of it. — *David's* reason for this was, that which will ever have the greatest sway with all that are truly godly, since his glory and their interest are in it. As,

1st, He is the Father, and fountain of mercy, and in his hands they are safe; which they ever prefer to any instruments, deputed in the course of his providence, to do his work; and

* Isa. xlvii. 7.

when

when it is necessary, they chuse his hand, not to destroy, but to correct; to which they humbly submit, having still an hope to sustain them. Which was the church's view, express'd by the prophet thus; ---*Come and let us return unto the Lord, for he hath torn, and he will heal us: he hath smitten, and he will bind us up; after two days, he will revive us; in the third day, he will raise us up, and we shall live in his sight. Then shall we know, if we follow on to know the Lord; his going forth is prepared as the morning, and he will come unto us as the rain, and as the former and latter rain unto the earth**. There's loving-kindness to his children, inseparable from all those visitations, that come directly from the hand of the Lord.

2. In the darkest dispensations they are better in the hands of their Father, that delights in them to do them good, than where both the power, and desire are wanting; even when they know with *David* † they have *sinned, and done foolishly*, and insured to themselves a

* Hos. vi. 1, 2, 3. † 2 Sam. xxiv. 10.

scourge,

icourge, that they expect every moment: It is most grateful to fall into his hand, against whom only they have sinned, and pour out their souls before him, making their humble request, that they may *fall into the hand of the Lord, and not into the hand of man*; that he alone, who is injured, may demand what is good in his sight, whilst they are silent, and put their mouths in the dust, being certain that it is the Lord's doing. And tho' they mourn in the bitterness of their souls, it is more supportable, than those perplexities that attend dispensations that are so deep, as that the reason of them can't be come at, though it be certainly just; as it was once *David's* case to be at a loss how to account for his affliction, whether it were of the Lord, or of the children of men. But here it was quite different, he had gone quite out of the way, and was brought back in a method, as visible as his departure, and might gather instruction from every part of it.

3. What comes from the hand of the Lord, produces the best effects, in melting the heart into subjection, and humbling

ling the soul in dust ; which ends can never be attained by any that are employed as rods of anger in his hand ; and though they execute their dreadful commission never so fully, those that it takes in, are seldom or ever the better for it ; if they are stricken, they will revolt more and more. But what comes from the hand of the Lord, is like all his works in the creation, very good, and attended with spiritual advantage ; or, at least, brings about such a submission, as tends to his own glory, and the designs of his unerring providence in the world : And, to allude to the *Psalmist's* * words, *if the righteous Lord smites, it is a kindness* ; if he reprove, it is an *excellent oil*, that makes the heart soft, and sets off all the acknowledgments of mercy with a divine lustre ; being untainted with the shocking severity of the wicked, or the imperfection and frailty of the good ; whose correction often becomes ineffectual, thro' trifling impertinence, as a general incident. But the work of a divine hand is perfect, carrying in it all that is needful, and no more.

* Psal. cxli. 5.

4. In falling into the hand of the Lord, there is patience and hope still remain, to such as fear the Lord, and seek out his works with delight. When once men come to be persuaded that no calamity attends them, but what falls infinitely short of their deserving; and that there are no formidable circumstances, but might, with the same justice, have had an additional weight of sorrows; murmurs give place to a patient waiting, and in judgment, they behold mercy, in being still in the hand of the Lord: And, as in the course of providence, he thus hath ever dealt with such nations as were still to share his favour, in preserving them from being broken and subdued by their enemies; so whilst they have the happiness to behold themselves in such a case, there is hope, as not being devoted to destruction at present; and for such other scourges as we may be sensible of, we are to look into our own conduct for the particular reasons, and, when found, must say with *Job*, *we have sinned, and what shall we do unto thee, O thou preserver of men* *.

* *Job*. vii. 20.

III. It is a presage of indignation, when he puts it off to others. The iniquity of a people is certainly at the full, when the Lord no longer continues them in his hand, but casts them into the hand of man; and then they fall into the hand of enemies; than, which, no circumstance in the present state, is more to be dreaded: For as to fall into the hand of the children of disobedience, that are vessels of wrath, and never more honoured from above, but are employed in the drudgery of vengeance, which best suits their gloomy genius, is the very next remove to falling into his hand that worketh in them. So that it is no wonder, that it was a grand request with the servants of God in all ages; and with none more frequent than *David*: Those that are acquainted with the book of *Psalms*, cannot be ignorant, that it hath a place in most of these divine breathings; *Arise, O Lord, save me, O my God, for thou hast smitten all mine enemies on the check-bone: Thou hast broken the teeth of the ungodly. Lead me, O Lord, in*
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thy righteousness, because of mine enemies: make thy paths straight before my face. Deliver me, O Lord, from mine enemies; I flee unto thee to hide me *. As never any made one supplication, but had some enemies to crave succour against, so we find it like an introduction to the book of *Psalms*, and a remarkable article that is continued to the close.

2. Such as fall into the hand of man, are never better, but worse for it, so far as any thing may be justly attributed to them, that is of a benign influence. *Israel* and *David* had sinned; and what advantage cou'd it possibly be, to fall into the hand of the nations round about; who were always on the watch for an opportunity to seize upon their temporal felicity, and profess'd enemies to the God of *Israel*, and his pure worship? which so far as was in their power, they would certainly have abolished, to make way for their own idolatry. And the ark and tabernacle,

* *Psal.* iii. 7 ---v. 8.---cxliii. 9.

the law and testimony, have been laid aside for *Dagon, Molech, Baal*, and *Ashtoreth*, and such other abominations of the heathen. Such a giving up as this, would have been from bad to worse; and instead of a chastisement, for particular offences, sending a judgment on them, to become constant worshippers of devils; for what other nations offered in sacrifice, they offered *to devils, and not unto God* *. And with what other view can we look upon being given up to the power of those † nations, from whom we have any apprehensions? Can we, upon just grounds, indulge the least hope of publick advantage? Or, is there not the greatest certainty, that we should be vastly much worse? Our sin, whereby we had forfeited our protection in the enjoyment of our blessings, would be no part of their concern; but to fasten the yoke of slavery on our necks, and superstition on our minds, never to recover them any more, leaving us only at

* 1 Cor. x. 20.

† France and Spain.

liberty to mourn our loss. If we had made ourselves vile, they would make us miserable. What more fatal difference could there be between our happy constitution, that has in it a just extent, with regard to the * prince, and glorious security to the liberties of the people, and a form of government that knows no bound but the variable or unrighteous will of the prince ; which is a constant source of misery to the wretched dependants on it. And how sad the exchange of a religion, grounded on the bible, as the certain dictates of the Spirit of truth, to venture our eternal happiness on uncertain traditions, idolatrous worship, superstitious observances, and idle tales ! and these imposed with threats and tortures. Nor is it any easy task for such as avow such a scheme of politicks, or religion, to

* When the *Greeks* called their kings βασιλεῖς, the word seems to import what was the nature and end of their dignity ; for it is derived from βασις *sedes*, & λαός *populus* : So the first, and perhaps most happy princes, were appointed. and reigned by the consent of the people, which is the best administration, and I hope always will be the glory of our land, and such as reign over us.

prove

prove, that they either *fear God, or regard man* *. And so far, as they endeavour to lay others under the direction of them, they are enemies to both ; except it be love to God, to banish his word out of the world ; or to mankind it be a special favour to subvert their liberty, and make them slaves.

3. Ambition, and false religion, have ever been productive of rage and cruelty. With instances of this kind, antient and modern accounts will plentifully furnish us : all which give us one instruction ; that such as were concerned in them, were not for reforming such as had fallen into their hands, but tormenting them. And, if at any time they were brought to reflect upon the causes of their being subjected thus, with relenting breasts, and afflicted souls, to their oppressors, it is purely accidental, and as wide of their treatment, as design ; *for the tender mercies of the wicked are cruel* †. And our own

* Luke xviii. 2.

† Prov. xii. 10.

lands, have, in past times, been a gloomy theatre, and drunk deeply of their cup.

4. When God makes a full end of a nation, the method that he takes, is to deliver them into the hand of man; nor is there, that I know of, more than two instances to the contrary, in sacred or prophane history. One is the destruction of the world by the deluge, in which *all flesh died, that moved on the earth; both of fowl, and of cattle, and of beast, and of every creeping thing that creepeth on the earth, and every man* *. And the other is; that the Lord rained upon Sodom and Gomorrah, *brimstone and fire from the Lord out of heaven: And he overthrew those cities, and all the plain, and all the inhabitants of the cities, and that which grew upon the ground* †. But in other public instances of judgment, his path hath been one; and the nearer he approaches to it, the greater is the solicitude of his

* Gen. vii. 21.

† Gen. xix. 24, 25.

children,

children, what the end shall be. Who may not tremble when any visitation affords such a prospect, as the way of the Lord of old; whereby he hath oft broken the nations; the *Babylonians* by the *Medes* and *Persians*; and they by the *Macedonians*; and they again by the *Romans*; and the *Romans* by other nations? These are capital instances of the most considerable acts of providential government; tho' each of these arrived to their height, by nations of lesser note falling into their hands: And what has been so in former days, may be now, if we come to consider our desert, as a backsliding people; and it is purely owing to the long-suffering of our God, if the ominous token, of falling into the hand of man, does not appear, in the triumphing of our enemies over us; but we are still in the hands of the Lord, whose favour is not to be abused, by indulging iniquity, to the affronting of him that dealeth thus graciously with us. What further I shall advance, will be by way of improvement. As,

1. When

1. When national power is the most formidable, God still demands the glory, from which no circumstances of grandeur and puissance can exempt. The strength of *Israel*, was hardly ever more considerable than in the days of *David*. *There were in Israel eight hundred thousand valiant men, that drew the sword; and the men of Judah were five hundred thousand men* *. A numerous assembly; and, according to the encomium which had been before given, *like unto the host of God* †, with which *David's* heart was lifted up. Alas! what is man, without grace from above continually determining the mind, and directing the steps; no longer than saints are drawn, do they proceed in a right way; and in the intervals of suspension, are even as others. And the man after God's own heart, glories in an arm of flesh, and is humbled for it; which is written for our instruction, to look upon the mightiest forces, as in

* 2 Sam. xxiv. 19.

† 1 Chron. xii. 22.

the hand of the Lord; who does whatsoever pleaseth him, *in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth*; with whom it is no new thing to blow upon the greatest undertaking, and eclipse the glory of nations, who have trusted in themselves, and not in him.

2. When the affairs of the land are in an uncertain situation, and we know not what the end may be, it should be improved as a motive of love and unity amongst all consistent Protestants; at least, so far as regards them, as they must stand or fall, as these succeed or are disappointed, and not listen to the insinuations of such as, only wait to divide, that they may inflame us. And as their sentiments of the cause in which they are engaged are the same, with one heart they should supplicate success from heaven; not being discouraged, tho' we know that we have many enemies, that are in the midst of us. Nay, we should do it with greater earnestness and importunity; for were we in their power, we should soon find the effects of their principles in the loss of our own happiness; which hath been as often verified, as they, or their fathers, have had the reins of civil government;

vernment ; which, I am persuaded, will sufficiently vindicate me in your apprehensions, from the charge of being an unjust declaimer. It is what we have heard with our ears, and our fathers have told us, how fatally true they have ever been in observing the articles that make up their dreadful creed ; not one of which can pretend to the least divine authority, or carries in it any thing beneficent, or conformable to the rights of nature ; according to which mankind is to be preserved and cherished, and not oppressed and destroyed. And surely, that which is contrary to these, must be a wretched cause ; and yet we see many stupidly and wickedly embark'd in it. And whilst we are making our addresses, that we may not fall into the hand of man, and that the publick efforts that we are now making as a nation, may be succeeded, their desires and prayers run in a contrary channel : But may we trust in the Lord, tho' undeserving, to keep us from falling into the hand of man, whilst the prayer of the wicked *becomes sin **, and their hope shall be as *the giving up of the ghost †*.

* Psal. cix. 7.

† Job xi. ult.

3. We are to express our thankfulness to the Lord, who hath hitherto kept us from falling into the hand of man, by putting a just value upon those blessings, that we enjoy in consequence thereof. Our liberty, and freedom from the rod of the oppressor, being governed by laws that are just and equal, is a jewel that secures us all the enjoyments, that God hath graciously given us, from the encroachment of arbitrary power. And shall we trifle with it, by showing the least countenance to the specious pretensions of such, as envy our felicity, and that government, that protects us in the enjoyment of it? The gospel of Christ also remains with us, as an effect of our being in the hand of the Lord, which is more precious than all the world besides; the richest inheritance we can enjoy ourselves, or leave to posterity is the word of life, in which eternal truth, and blessed hopes are set before us. How gloomy the day of such a remove! 'tis the highest instance of judgment, for the Father of lights to leave us in darkness, and cause our glory to depart from us. And are not these worth the vindicating, according to the abilities we have received,

ed; which, doubtless, can't be employ'd to higher purposes, and concern all ranks and degrees, from the cabinet of state, to the humblest roof; assisting in council, or giving tribute to *Cæsar*: and such as in the course of providence, may not be capable of either of them, can yet recommend the cause to heaven, where the least of all saints have access; to whom a prince, or nation, may be more obliged, than to the most brilliant courtier, or person of the highest distinction, though unknown to them. Thus such measures as have been sanctified by prayer, we may hope, will be succeeded by providence; whilst in our joint requests for our Sovereign, whose interest is the same with our own, we imitate that godly and faithful subject *Araunah*, saying, *the Lord thy God accept thee* *.

* 2 Sam. xxiv. 23.

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